

do. I do not believe, however, that God answers the prayers of Christians today in just the same way that he answered Christ; but all believers have God's words, and they should obey them and live them.

BIBLICAL ESSAY—Continued

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In his physical nature little John grew, perhaps rapidly, and no doubt developed into as perfect manhood as is possible for humanity to attain unto. "He waxed strong in spirit." In his inner, intellectual and spiritual life, he became strong, having been possessed by, and filled with, the Holy Spirit from his birth; in his educational history this will be more fully developed.

"He was in the deserts until the day of his showing to Israel." In his childhood, perhaps under two years of age, we find him in the deserts, in uninhabited countries desolate and forsaken, where no human beings dwelt. Here we find the little boy who is destined to be the great prophet and forerunner of Jesus.

The inquiring mind asks, how did he get there, and why was he thus isolated from his kindred and friends, and deprived of the means of education and civilization that was needful and available in his native country? Tradition teaches that his mother, in order to rescue her son from the murder of the children at Bethlehem, which Herod commanded, fled with him into the deserts. She, finding no place of refuge, the mountain opened at her request, and gave the needed shelter in its bosom. Zacharias, having been questioned by Herod as to where his son was to be found, and refusing to answer, was slain by the tyrant. At a later period Elizabeth died, when angels took the youth under their care. (Frabricus, Cod. Apocryph, P. 117, S. 9; compare *Leben Jesu*, I 163, remark 4). While this is among the Apocryphal or traditional writings, much of it may be correct. It is only right and natural to believe that the Lord would take care of John, altho only a child. His parents were righteous and full of the Holy Spirit, who directed them in saving the life of the forerunner. That the Lord would by special, miraculous power open a cave in the mountain to receive this exiled mother and her only son might be questioned by some. There were, no doubt, caves and openings in the mountains of that desert country to which Elizabeth had fled with her child. The mother, upon whom the maternal care of her son solely depended, would at once seek such a place of refuge where, thru the protecting care of guardian angels as mediums of the triune God, they would be kept from harm and danger.

During the boyhood life of John his Christian mother was his teacher and benefactor, having collected the needed and, perhaps, the only available material for his raiment, and, with her aged fingers formed the same into cloth and the "camel's hair garment;" and, by some means, having obtained the

skin of some animal, she produced the needed girdle to support the same. In this costume we find him clothed in his manhood days.

The parents by prayerful consideration, agreement and deep solicitude, in behalf of the welfare of their only son, consent to separate, Elizabeth with the child, fleeing to the deserts; Zacharias remaining for a time, perhaps with the understanding that after the edict of Herod was past, they might meet again and enjoy life together. Not knowing the future, no doubt a sad farewell took place between the parents and the lovely little boy. The priest of the most high God, impressing his last token of love upon the lips of a weeping wife and a smiling child, they part, with hopes of meeting again. But sad to think, and more sad for Zacharias to learn, that the cruel tyrant, Herod, would call upon him to reveal the place of his son's refuge that he might have him put to death, Zacharias, knowing that this child was to be "called the prophet of the most high, and was to go before the face of the Lord to make ready his ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto his people in the remission of their sins," would not, and could not disclose his place of retreat; and because of his refusal must suffer martyrdom.

Now, returning to the early life of this marvelous boy and his aged mother, we find them as predicted, in the deserts. In their seclusion the mother could not obtain the ordinary food upon which they formerly subsisted. A species of locusts, or grasshoppers were abundant, and honey in the clefts of the rocks was available; upon this simple but healthy food, "locusts and wild honey," they subsisted. This was the scripture fulfilled, "He shall not drink wine, nor any strong drink." "He came neither eating nor drinking." After his being made known to Israel he would not partake of the ordinary food of that age and generation.

Having no Biblical record or biography of Elizabeth after the edict of Herod, it is but reasonable to believe that she died in the desert away from her native home and kindred; no loving husband to care for her, no friends to visit, comfort and console her; no physician to administer restoratives or opiates to relieve human sufferings; no human being present but an only son, a youth who lovingly and faithfully administered to his aged mother all the assistance of which he was possessed. But finally the moment arrived; the angel of death entered that lonely cavern and placed his cold icy hand upon the aged mother in Israel; with her cold hand grasped tightly by her loving and beloved son, John, her spirit was borne swiftly away by the death angel to the God who gave it, there to await the resurrection of the just and be ushered into the haven of eternal rest and blessedness. Perhaps Michael, the arch angel and undertaker, who buried Moses' body took charge of the remains of Elizabeth and performed the memorial rites in the presence of an angel band

and an only son, now an orphan. The last sad rites now ended, father and mother now asleep in the Lord, John still remains in the deserts, "until the day of his showing to Israel." He was to be a forerunner.

In the oriental countries men of nobility or royalty, while traveling in their chariots, would have messengers running before them to clear the way so that nothing might impede their progress; also evidencing that they were approaching so that the people might be ready to receive and entertain them. Webster defines as follows: "*Forerunner*, a messenger sent before to give notice of the approach of others; a harbinger; hence a sign foreshowing something to follow; a prognostic." The ancient forerunners were properly educated and disciplined for their mission and work. So by analogy John, the forerunner of Christ, in order to present a proper showing to Israel, must be properly educated and disciplined to meet the demands of the then existing age and generation of the Hebrew nation, thus bringing about a reformation in Israel thru the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven.

This brings the writer to consider the educational history of this notable person up to the age of about thirty years, at which period he entered upon his public ministry. His devoted mother, having been his first teacher, and perhaps passing into death while John was but a youth, he is left in the deserts where the toiling of husbandry is unknown; where the saw and hammer of the mechanic is unheard; where no earthly mansions are constructed; no church spires point heavenward; where no school buildings, Academies, Colleges, Universities or Theological seminaries exist. How then could this young man obtain a competent education to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ? Tradition teaches that, "After his mother died, angels took charge of him." If this be correct, then angels were his school associates. Blessed, happy school companions. We might conjecture as to who constituted the "faculty" in this heavenly Theological seminary in which this great prophet and preacher was educated. Inspiration thru the Apostle John teaches that "there was a man sent from God, whose name was John," Hear this prophet himself declare, "He that sent me, the same said unto me, he upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining," etc. From the facts briefly stated, we learn that God himself was the great master teacher of John. He, no doubt, by miraculous incarnation, descended from heaven and came down into the deserts and there taught this representative character all the higher branches of Bible theology needful in order to fill and fulfill his missions in the world. This course of education was of long duration. At the age of about thirty years he graduated in the highest "theological school" that ever did or ever will exist, and with the highest honors that could possibly be bestowed upon a human being in